

Consumer Council News

March 23, 2004

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ARMY Survey

The Army's first-ever Survey of mental health in a combat zone showed that soldiers in Iraq last year suffered from low morale, high stress and holes in the Army's support system. 17% of soldiers were assessed to be suffering traumatic stress, depression or anxiety and were deemed to be functionally impaired. The army mental health specialists lacked key resources to control combat stress. This study is seen as helping to improve treatment in the field.

Newsletter sponsored by
VA Mental Health
Consumer Council
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Women, The Military, and PTSD

The National Center for PTSD recently focused on women in the military in their annual report. Work over the past decade has brought to light several crucial differences between PTSD in women and in men.

The type of trauma that is experienced by women is more connected to sexual assault or harassment and not combat. Women are more likely to develop depression, anxiety, whereas men are more susceptible to other kinds of problems, such as alcoholism and substance abuse. The research that has come from the Women's Health Sciences Division validated the fact that PTSD is an issue of sexual trauma in the military, and has the same level of credibility as combat-related trauma. A survey was done of 4,500 former reservists, both men and women, to determine whether they had ex-

perienced sexual trauma and/or sexual harassment while they were in the service. 60% of women and 25% of men had such experiences and it was determined that it would cost close to a billion dollars to treat

for the next 5-10 years. The National Center's top priorities include:

- Identifying the most effective treatments for PTSD in women
- Working more actively with DOD to identify at risk women
- Disseminating information through educational programs.

For more information: www.ncptsd.org



Peer to Peer Resource Center

The Peer-to-Peer Resource Center is affiliated with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, or DBSA, which is a consumer directed national organization that serves people living with many kinds of mental illnesses, including depression and bipolar disorder etc.

The Peer-to Peer Resource Center is funded as a National Consumer/Consumer Supporter Self-Help Technical Assistance Center. The Center focuses on preparing peers to be an integral part of recovery-oriented mental health service delivery systems nationwide. One of the Center's goals is to create and maintain a comprehensive listing of existing and emerging peer training programs and initiatives from across the U.S. In a report of the subcommittee on consumer

issues of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health with emphasis on recovery stated "the culture of mental health care must shift to a culture that is based on self-determination, empowering relationship, and full participation of mental health consumers in the work and community life of society. To build a recovery-based system, the mental health community must draw upon the resources of people with mental illness in their communities."

Peer programs will be important in shaping future mental health services.

For more info: www.peersupport.org

Online Newsletter

www.mentalhealth.med.va.gov/cc

PTSD Hearings

On March 11, 2004 the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health held hearings on the care of military men and women serving in Afghanistan and Iraq at they transition from the military to the VA. Dr. Harold Kudler, Co Chair, VA Under Secretary of Health's Special Committee on PTSD testified on several PTSD issues. He recognized that 40% of all casualties hospitalized at Walter Reed reported symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of PTSD. VA reports 13,000 Iraqi Freedom veterans and nearly 1,800 Enduring Freedom veterans from Afghanistan have presented to VA Medical Centers for a variety of health concerns. About 4,500 have contacted Vet Centers as of March.

The intervention that Dr. Kudler was recommending was to discuss in small groups in plain language the normal difficulties reported by combat veterans. Rather than doing this during acute demobilization this would be done after the soldiers had been home

for a few weeks when they were more likely to recognize any existing readjustment problems.

Among the problems for receiving services is that only half of all VA medical center have PTSD Clinical Teams and many of the staff originally dedicated to PTSD services have been drawn off to other duties or lost to attrition. The latest report on VA PTSD programs documents that the intensity of services in VA PTSD Clinics has decreased by 13.2% since 1995. The number of veterans SC for PTSD doubled during those same years. It is clear that VA will need to build up its capacity to treat the number of projected veterans that will need services for PTSD. There is a variability across the networks in VA for PTSD services and the Special PTSD Committee recommend implementing a performance measure to gauge commitment and achievement in having services for veterans that need PTSD treatment. The challenge will be great and VA needs to prepare for the future.

VHA Mental Health Consumer/Advocate Councils take on Challenges

Thanks to great grass roots efforts of consumers, families, mental health advocates and support from dedicated VA staff and Mental Health leadership VHA Mental Health Consumer Councils continue to grow across the country.

During the last year 12 VISNs have reported on the development and formation of Mental Health Consumer/Advocate Councils. Some of the highlights include:

- ◆ The new formed West LA Council has been developing a proposal for a Vet to Vet program. A program where veterans help other veteran overcome mental illness and substance abuse.
- ◆ The Baltimore/Perry Point Council each year target a specific mental health issue that they can influence and they have been successful in ex-

panding substance abuse care in Community Based Clinics. The Council sees it's role as more advisory to the Mental Health Executive Council.

- ◆ The Madison, WI Council has developed a survey on patient satisfaction and they call 10 outpatients a week and ask questions to gather information on mental health services.
- ◆ VISN 1 established the Veteran and Family Advisory Board that contributed to the CARES Planning initiative in providing information on gaps in services. They were also successful in recommending the co-location of a Day treatment program in a CBOC (Community Based Clinic).
- ◆ The Houston, TX Council goal was to improve and strengthen mental health programs and they developed pamphlets for their mental health pro-

Information and Resources

May 17-20, 2004
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
Annual Conference
Wyndham City Center Hotel
Washington, DC
202-546-1969

June 9-12, 2004
National Mental Health Association Annual Conf.
Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill
Washington, DC
www.nmha.org